

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

September 21, 2022

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We write, as members of Congress committed to supporting farmers, to urge you to do everything in your power to stop farmer attrition and the loss of farmland while the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) works to implement the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). We were proud to pass this transformative legislation and support its investments in our nation's food security and farmers, particularly those that have faced past discrimination by the USDA. We stand ready to assist you in keeping farmers in agriculture as you work to implement the law swiftly and equitably.

Congress recognizes that our farmers deserve certainty about their financial options and that protecting their land is critical to ensuring their economic stability and the nation's short and long-term food security. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress has made major investments to prevent the loss of small businesses, restaurants, and farms. The Congressional intent to keep arable land in agriculture and farmers, especially those that have faced past discrimination, on their land is particularly clear. The expeditious implementation of Sections 22006 and 22007 of the IRA will strengthen family farms and reverse the more than century-long trend of decreasing agricultural land held by Black and other minority farmers.

We are concerned that, even as these programs are being implemented, farmers are being forced to choose between foreclosure or restructuring their debt and therefore being precluded from debt forgiveness. This is especially troubling because, thanks to the work of the Biden Administration, the USDA, and Congress, help is on the way. As assistance from the IRA is being implemented, forcing farmers to choose between restructuring their loans and foregoing future relief or losing their farms while they wait for relief and, in some cases, financial discrimination assistance, is contrary to Congressional intent.


As Vladimir Putin continues his horrific war in Ukraine, American farmers have redoubled their efforts to help provide the world with sufficient food and fiber even as they face increased fertilizer prices and, in many places, droughts and storms fueled by climate change. The USDA has supported American farmers in this effort, granting them additional flexibilities to increase their production and worked with farmers in Ukraine to support continued production. These steps are important. However, a holistic approach to improving food security at home and abroad must begin with ensuring that American farmers, especially those that are financially distressed and/or victims of past discrimination by the USDA, are not forced off their land and out of agriculture as the IRA's financial assistance programs for such farmers are implemented.

We therefore urge you to provide swift and equitable relief for borrowers with at-risk agricultural operations, as required under Section 22006 of the IRA, to prevent further loss of farmers and agricultural land, especially among farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners who may be eligible for financial assistance due to past discrimination. We also request that you take immediate action to ensure that producers with farm loans guaranteed by the USDA are protected from foreclosure while the IRA programs are implemented. We stand ready to assist you in addressing past injustices and ensuring America's agricultural community recovers from the pandemic stronger, more resilient.

Sincerely,



Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress



G. K. Butterfield
Member of Congress



A. Donald McEachin
Member of Congress



Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



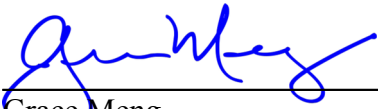
André Carson
Member of Congress



Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress



Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
Member of Congress



Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Lisa Blunt Rochester
Member of Congress



Jimmy Panetta
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Troy Carter
Member of Congress